

# A Dream of Passion

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I don't know who she was or how she happened to fall in love with Morrolan.

He was off at Dzur Mountain when the alarms went off. I was visiting his home, and I used to run his security, so I felt obligated to at least look into it. The images forming in my mind showed a hallway near his personal chambers, so I rushed there as fast as I could, which wasn't as fast as I could have a few years before.

I checked my weapons as I ran, and made contact with some guards who were already on the way. The two who were closest didn't respond, so they were either busy or just unable to answer.

Quite.

When I reached the doorway of Morrolan's bed chamber, I saw them both. One was stretched out on his side, the other doubled over. They were dead, and we'll leave it at that.

The other guards weren't there yet. Loiosh said, "Careful, boss," and settled onto my shoulder. I could feel him testing his wings, in case he should need to launch himself somewhere in a hurry.

There was a soft explosion from inside. I didn't draw a weapon because I didn't know what I'd need; I burst through.

The room was big, furnished in black because Morrolan is like that, and empty. A small, ornate door in the back was swinging gently, and my heart skipped a beat. Even Sethra Lavode would have had some trouble opening that door. I let the gold chain I had misnamed Spellbreaker fall into my hand and I ran through the door up into Morrolan's high tower.

I was right behind the intruder when we emerged into the room of the castle where Morrolan is never to be disturbed. I had time for one brief glimpse of her. She was tall and dark of hair, and wearing white, and I decided there might have been Dzurlord in her somewhere. She was standing in front of the window that leads to anywhere. She looked up at me and I raised Spellbreaker, but she made no attack, nor could I read any expression on her face. She turned and stepped through the window.

Years ago, I might have reached Morrolan and asked him how important it was to him that someone had invaded his most inner sanctum. I would at least have paused long enough to make contact with Kragar and tell him to mind the shop. But she'd killed two people I knew so I didn't care what Morrolan thought, and Kragar was long dead anyway. I raised Spellbreaker to give it a good look at the window, then followed her through.

A burning that was neither hot nor painful ran through me, and all of my senses took the day off, save that I was aware of Loiosh in a way that I only am when passing through a Gate to some other place. All of the stars that are hidden by the orange-red sky of the Dragaeran Empire came and danced before the eyes of my mind, and there was the music of mindless creation and senseless destruction for the ears of my soul, and at last a shower of golden sparks that faded, faded, and was gone. I'd done it before, and I don't like it, but it's better than teleportation. I'd rather go through trauma than discomfort, which may be my whole problem.

I'm used to the sky of the Empire, which is never clear, and I've seen the Eastern sky, which is either blue or covered with grey or white, so I shouldn't have been discomfited by the purple overcast, but I was, so we'll say no more about it. I stood on dusty ground, surrounded by brown rocks. There was a light colored horse, saddled, standing nearby.

"Behind you, boss."

I turned, and saw a figure in white upon another horse, riding away down a dirt road. I wondered whether I remembered how to ride well enough to even mount a horse, but it let me approach without flinching, and I was on it before I had decided. The saddle was made of wood, and if you've never used a wooden saddle, believe me when I say you aren't missing anything.

It's startling how far off the ground you feel on a horse when you're not used to it. The mechanics of riding while wearing a rapier aren't actually all that formidable, they just made me nervous. I didn't worry about these things too much, though, because just staying on the animal was taking most of my attention.

Then the storm broke, with slats of rain, and trails of lightning that Morrolan would have been proud of, and thunder like to deafen me. Loiosh ducked inside my cloak. The road surface became harder, so I moved off to the side. I turned up my collar and ducked down to keep my eyes clear, but nevertheless almost ran into a wagon going very fast in the other direction, with bright lamps and no horses that I noticed. After that I stayed even further to the side.

When the storm let up a few minutes later she was still ahead of me, white garments trailing behind her. Presently I realized that she had drawn rein and was waiting for me. We were at the end of the road, in a circular area surrounded by trees that tickled the purple sky. A cairn of loose, small stones stood to the side.

I slowed my horse to a walk, and realized that it was breathing very hard, and wondered how much more it could have taken. Loiosh looked out from my cloak, and took his place on my shoulder again. I took my time approaching her in order to catch my breath.

"There's something here, boss."

I decided I felt it too, but couldn't pinpoint it, nor decide what it was. I thought about Spellbreaker, but left it in place.

I stopped about ten paces away and looked her over. She seemed young as Dragaerans measure age, and quite pretty, though not stunning. She dismounted. I said, "Who are you?"

She didn't answer. I decided she probably wasn't a Dzurlord, but I could see traces of no other House about her features.

I licked my lips. "It isn't easy to break down that door. You're very good."

She still said nothing, and I considered the ease with which she had broken through the door, and her use of Morrolan's window, which Verra, Morrolan's Demon-Goddess (and mine) considered an Imperial Secret. I thought about the horse I had found, standing alone and saddled, with stirrups the right length for me, and I said, "Why the chase?"

"To bring you here." Her voice was deep, and resonated oddly, as the woods around us echoed her tone.

I said, "You created this world?"

"Yes."

"Does Morrolan know about you?"

"Not yet."

"You know that he is loyal to Verra?"

"Yes. But does he love her?"

"I'm not certain. Why didn't you kill me?"

"My purpose was to bring you here." She gestured at the cairn. "You've heard of the sword, Godslayer?"

I licked my lips and studied the cairn and realized that that was what we'd been feeling. "You found it."

She nodded. "Fetch it."

"Boss..."

"I know."

I dismounted, walked to the pile, and began pulling away stones. After a time I found a thick metal box, with another within it, and within that the sword, which was taller than I was. I felt that it was alive. I didn't touch it.

"Pick it up," she said.

I took a deep breath and did so. When a god commands, what can a mortal do? I thought of calling out to Verra, but from a world that this other had created, it didn't seem wise. The sword fairly leapt in my hand, and Godslayer's thoughts, which I won't detail, came unbidden to my brain. I knew it to be stronger than Morrolan's Blackwand or Alier's Pathfinder, and I was very frightened. She said, "You are an assassin."

There was little point in denying it to her so I nodded.

"Kill Verra for me."

I was surprised that I was unsurprised. I said, "You really have it bad, don't you?" She didn't deign to respond. I hefted the blade. "The fee?"

"I can make you a god."

I coughed. "That's certainly quite a fee." I looked around. "Is this to be my world?"

"If you want it."

"Verra is my patron goddess, as well as Morrolan's."

"I know."

I remembered a time, years before, when I had thought my wife was lost to me, and remembered how I had felt and acted. I said, "What if I refuse?"

She walked up until she was three paces from me. Godslayer trembled in my hand, but I kept its point

toward the ground. "If you refuse," she said, "I'll destroy you, and your wife, and your son, and all who are dear to you." As she finished speaking she closed her eyes and lifted her chin imperiously.

I felt tears begin, for the first time in more years than I cared to remember. I retained the presence of mind to let go of Godslayer as soon as it entered her breast. I backed away. Loiosh squeezed my shoulder.

She moaned softly and sank to her knees. Lightning crackled in the sky once more and the ground shook. She turned to me and said, "Tell Morrolan I loved him."

"I will," I said. She fell to her side, and the ground on which she lay seemed to breathe with her. Then she stopped breathing, and the earth trembled. Godslayer glowed with a grey sheen along its black length.

"Loiosh, did she really want me to kill her?"

"Either you or Verra, I think."

I sighed. She preferred oblivion to pathos, which may have been her whole problem. Cracks appeared in the sky above me and in the earth below me and in the air around me. Through the cracks I saw rivulets of nothing amid faint sparks of disforming matter.

I took out Spellbreaker and asked it to take me home. It caught me and I was torn apart once more, in yet another way, and reassembled on the floor of Morrolan's tower. I thought of calling to Verra and telling her that I'd chosen not to kill her, but I would have been angry when she laughed.

"You all right, boss?"

I didn't answer.